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Bamuturaki leaves loss-making Uganda Airlines

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

KAMPALA: The Board of Uganda Airlines has decided to advertise the position of chief executive officer (CEO) nearly four years after Ms Jennifer Bamuturaki took the reins.

Ms Bamuturaki, the current CEO, yesterday announced that she will be stepping down and urged her colleagues to keep their eyes peeled for the advert and apply if they qualify.

In an internal email that leaked last evening, she wrote: "The Board will advertise the position of chief executive officer shortly, and you are all encouraged to apply if you meet the required qualifications. The job description and application form will be published on the website."

Her departure will mark the end of almost four years at the helm of the national carrier. She was appointed CEO in July 2022, replacing Mr Cornel Muleya, who had been shown the door earlier that year.

This development comes hot on the heels of a probe launched barely a month ago by the criminal investigations directorate (CID), working jointly with the State House Anti-Corruption Unit, into the airline's operations.

In a January 7 letter addressed to Ms Bamuturaki, CID and SHACU requested extensive financial and procurement records, citing alleged abuse of office, embezzlement, and false accounting linked to the airline's transactions. Investigators are seeking board-approved business plans, budgets for the 2024/2025 Financial Year, contracts related to Boeing aircraft acquisition, and procurement files covering key suppliers such as fuel, ground handling, travel, and aircraft leasing services.



Jennifer Bamuturaki

The letter, signed by Mr Fed Lumala on behalf of the CID deputy director of economic fraud and anti-corruption, also demanded detailed banking records, ticketing accounts, expenditure reports, and a list of companies involved in supporting the London route, one of the airline's most high-profile and capital-intensive ventures.

Since its revival in 2019, the State-owned carrier has leaned heavily on government support to bankroll fleet expansion, route launches, and operational costs.

In December last year, the Ministry of Works received Shs696.5b, part of the Shs1.6t Schedule Three of the Shs8.1t Supplementary Budget, to purchase new aircraft and beef up the fleet.

Long-term investment

Officials have consistently defended the airline as a long-term investment in tourism, trade, and connectivity. Yet critics argue that persistent losses, governance gaps, and opaque procurement processes have left the airline skating on thin ice.

The latest Auditor General's report revealed early signs of financial stabilisation in the 2024/2025 Financial Year, with a slight reduction in losses and growth in revenue. Uganda Airlines trimmed its net loss from Shs231.58b in 2023/2024 to Shs230.81b in 2024/2025, a modest Shs768m (0.33 percent) improvement.

The report noted that this small step forward was largely driven by a 19.2 percent revenue growth, thanks to expanded routes and increased international presence, including long-haul services such as the London route.

Despite these baby steps, the government has poured close to Shs1t into the airline since its revival, and mounting losses remain the elephant in the room.

Ms Bamuturaki herself admitted last year that it would take at least another four years before the airline could break even and turn a profit.

Bombardier spare parts controversy

Ms Bamuturaki, firmly refuted claims that its aircraft lack spare parts, affirming that spare parts are readily available despite global shortages, and clarified that despite Bombadier's sale, Uganda Airlines has access to multiple sources for spare parts, although global demand makes procurement challenging and time-consuming.

Ms Bamuturaki announced that by August Uganda Airlines is set to acquire three more planes and launch five more routes to Cape Town in South Africa, Accra in Ghana, Jordan in Oman, Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, and Gwangju in South Korea, calling on Ugandans to support the national airlines.

NO QUALIFICATIONS

In August 2022, Members of Parliament on the Committee on Commissions Statutory and State Enterprises (Cosase), had found out that the Chief Executive Officer of Uganda Airlines, Ms Jennifer Bamuturaki, did not have the requisite requirements as per the job description.

The Committee found out that Ms Bamuturaki did not have post-graduate training in administration as prescribed in the job requirements.

In her defence, Ms Bamuturaki argued that she had the required skills and experience to run the national career.

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